**Honesty, Self Efficacy, and Universality**

Might one’s truthfulness to their self and others be warped by circumstance? When is this justifiable?

How might one’s belief in their own advancement affect their honesty?

Sometimes, specific circumstances appear to apply to an isolated individual. In what ways might all humans experience these same conditions?

12th grade English Literature

**Designed by Brian Records**

CI 454E

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Rationale of “Honesty, Self-Efficacy, and Universality”

In the introduction of Peter Smagorinsky’s *Teaching English by Design,* he emphasizes the importance of understanding a text as a mode of learning beyond the concept of “official meaning” (2008, p.3). He demonstrates that the belief that a text has an “official meaning” discards any idea of uniqueness and authenticity which may be obtained from a work of fiction or nonfiction (Smagorinsky, 2008, pp.3-4). The enclosed unit plan “Honesty, Self-Efficacy, and Universality” is entirely based off of the same pedagogy. This unit plan emphasizes that anything which may be obtained from a text read in class, especially fiction, is only useful when authentically applied to the individual.

The primary text of this unit is John Darnielle’s *Wolf in White Van.* This text might have a simple “official meaning,” if it was assigned one. A defined purpose of *Wolf in White Van* might focus on the idea that “Sean’s decision to attempt suicide has a drastically negative effect on his life,” though this unit plan will attempt to obtain much more depth and situational relevance.

*Wolf in White Van* is told through the point of view of Sean Phillips as he looks back on many specific interactions of his life in non-chronological order. *Wolf in White Van* is a personal analysis of societal viewpoints, the purpose of fantasy, and the evolution of a human over time. Almost all meaning in this text is implied, and may be accessed more easily through discussion and the exchanging of interpretations. Most descriptions in the book are quite literal. The book is narrative and dialogue driven, though large explanations of the plot are left to the reader’s assumptions. Anything which is obtained from these descriptions must be obtained through analysis. There are not many details with factual importance to the real world in *Wolf in White Van*. This unit plan intends to draw analysis from the text, and use previously read texts to help the class understand the condition of Sean Phillips as it pertains to each individual in the classroom.

This unit will analyze texts in relation to three primary themes, honesty, self-efficacy, and universality. In assessing *Wolf in White Van,* this plan will analyze how Sean’s honesty with himself is portrayed, and how he prefers the people he interacts with to acknowledge his deformities, as opposed to denying them. The unit plan will also analyze how Sean promotes his own advancement, despite his harsh circumstances. Finally, the class will analyze how Sean’s condition might be relevant to someone who has not dealt with disfigurement or suicide, but nonetheless has to deal with the effects of previous decisions which were made by a less experienced version of the self. The class will look at how these themes apply to other characters that have been studied in other fiction and nonfiction works, and how each character might relate despite coming from completely different backgrounds. The personal experiences of each student will be the primary source for answering these analytical inquiries and will justify whatever result each student obtains. The test and writing assignment portion of this unit plan will also be largely based on the realizations that the class creates.

The texts which are used for this unit plan have been chosen because each of them may initially be presumed as separate in thematic relevance, though after analysis, they contain quite a bit of similarities with one another. This is where the unit theme of universality comes into play. This is not to say that each character deals with obstacles in the same manner, but rather that many of their obstacles are inherently similar.

The first section of this unit focuses on African American literature. This section helps build a historical understanding of the development of race relations in the United States, and features the nonfiction text *The Souls of Black Folk.* These African American selections of literature range from the turn of the 20th century to the beginning of World War II, and each selection represents a separate genre of literature. When compiled, the style of these selections demonstrate a two-sided account of African American history – one of progress and one of stagnation.

On the surface, the nonfiction text *The Souls of Black Folk* appears unrelated to *Wolf in White Van,* yet DuBois’s feeling of “twoness” is heavily displayed in Sean’s interactions with society. Chessnutt’s “The Passing of Grandison” seems to portray the Booker-T.-Washington-like African American in its character “Grandison,” an attitude which DuBois does not condone. “The Man who Lived Underground” is a very modernist take on race. It uses flaccid, symbolic, yet unrealistic imagery to portray the African American condition. This text prepares students for the loose and vague themes that may be found within the next selection they will read, *Wolf in White Van.* “The Man who Lived Underground” constructs a character who becomes removed from society entirely, and in this removal, he is able to see how absurd most social functions actually are. Sean, from *Wolf in White Van*, experiences this same disconnection from society, and also views many societal tendencies to be pointless and alienating.

In connecting these works in such an intricate fashion, it is inevitable that more connections may be made, and it will be the mission of each student to discover these possibilities sporadically during class writing assignments and discussion. In doing this, the class will stumble across authentic discovery, as none of these previously mentioned connections – or those which may arrive periodically, are connections which may be subscribed to by an “official meaning.” These connections will be unique to this unit’s context and reading selections. Smagorinsky states “. . .instead of focusing on important concepts, [official meaning based testing] fixates on labeling their parts. . .” (2008, p.7). This unit will not focus on the labeling of the literal, instead it will attempt to create an authentic depth to the literal. Furthermore, the unit approaches future social understanding which will benefit the students. Smagorinsky states, “[In providing a rationale for their lesson] Teachers might also teach a topic because they feel that they will be preparing students to help construct a better society in the future” (2008, p.145).

To add variety to this depth, music will be added to the Bell Work section of this unit plan. Each musical selection will be representative of the author and the time period in which the work being reflected upon was written. YouTube videos will be used in class to help explain important subordinate information in the unit. Two videos are planned with this lesson, one in which the students may hear the music of Williams and Walker, as well as an instructional video which explains the process for playing an RPG board game.

This unit plan appeals to multiple modalities of learning in that it does not require the same type of participation from all students. Students who do not feel comfortable speaking aloud will be allowed to express their comprehension through reflecting on their interpretation in writing. However, students who do feel comfortable expressing their interpretations verbally will not be required to submit their written interpretation of class discussion with their journal, as this would be redundant. Furthermore, students will be partially graded according to their development as a writer throughout the course.

The unit plan will have a heavy focus on reading and reading comprehension. Reading will occur in several forms. Reading will be peer-led in class, it will be done privately at home, and the instructor will read to the students aloud in class. All classroom reading will contain discussion pauses throughout, which will be prompted by the instructor. Students will also be allowed to interrupt class reading at appropriate times by raising their hand in order to ask a question or comment on the reading. This helps develop analysis in multiple forms. While reading *Wolf in White Van*, students will be required to read quite a bit of material at home. This will help students learn to enter the classroom with pre-developed personal opinions on the content, which will be stimulated by Bell Work writing prompts.

Slavin states that “Engaged time . . . is the time measure that is most frequently found to contribute to learning” (2012, p.317). This unit intends to use class time for active engagement and discussion. Silent reading is an important individual skill, but it may be done outside of the classroom. In creating an open and moldable discussion in the classroom this unit intends to facilitate constant engagement.

Slavin also comments on the importance of “smoothness” in the classroom. “Smoothness” refers to, “continued focus on a meaningful sequence of instruction” (Slavin, 2012, p.321). This unit will attempt to create smoothness through routine and adaptability. The daily writing prompts will serve as a manner of establishing a comfortable environment, as all students will know how to react each day when they first enter the classroom because they have already performed a similar task the previous day. After the writing prompt has been discussed, the class will approach the day’s reading assignment. The Calendar portion of this unit plan incorporates specific discussion ideas for each reading assignment, each which builds off of the reading and the previous discussion point. This will help to create a feeling of smoothness in the classroom without causing the lesson to be mundane.

Many of the discussion points within the first portion of “Honesty, Self-Efficacy, and Universality” will investigate African American heritage. The unit will focus on the manner in which these struggles and differences are relevant to all students, not just to the races they obviously pertain to. Often, African American history is taught in contexts which separate students within the classroom, informing some students of guilt and others of a tragic personal history. This unit plan attempts to connect feelings, and demonstrate that all humans share the same sets of emotions, and may have felt different degrees of the same injustices. I (Mr. Records) plan on sharing a story about the time that I was violently beaten for my race when I lived in Chicago. Smagorinksky states, “If you don’t teach with conviction, students will be the first to know” (2008, p.140). The intent of incorporating personal stories such as this is to add authenticity and conviction to the unit’s theme of universality. It is the intention of this unit plan to bring a unity of race, and a unity in the feeling of injustice. It is not the intention of this unit to divide it further by sulking in graphic accounts of history that are presented as applicable to individual races and separate types of people.

This unit plan will discuss female characters which are present in the assigned works, although no main characters during this unit are female. For example, “The Man Who Lived Underground” confronts negative stereotypes of femininity, which will be discussed in class. Another portion of the school year will integrate more female authors and feminine characters.

This aside, it may be said that all of the works contained within this unit scarcely confront the protagonists masculinity, and mostly exist separately from gender. Romantic relationships are practically nonexistent in this unit. Universality is a primary theme for this unit because the themes and works being discussed focus on equality, which is a subject intended to be genderless and appeal to sexes and sexualities identically. This being said, this is not an excuse to exempt female protagonists and authors from the curriculum. it is still important to portray a larger variety of sex and race in the classroom and such content will be integrated in the year-long curriculum.

Pam Cole states that literacy skills are built “most significantly” when students “work with their own ideas and interact with each other as they read, write, and discuss,” through making predictions and linking texts with one another (2009, pp.611-612). It is this authenticity, which this unit strives to achieve. Essentially, “Honesty, Self-Efficacy, and Universality” is a unit plan in which the instructor is taking the depth of his own experiences and providing them as a suggestion to draw further development in the classroom. The instructor will function as a guide, who has experienced the material previously, but does not represent an authority on the text. This unit intends to display to each student that a text does not have an authority, merely individual relevance.